

3-1-1928

The Palimpsest, vol.9 no.3, March 1928

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"The Palimpsest, vol.9 no.3, March 1928." *The Palimpsest* 9 (1928).

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol9/iss3/1>

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

PLEASE RETURN TO
IOWA STATE TRAVELING LIBRARY

The **P**ALIMPSEST

MARCH 1928

CONTENTS

The People's Theater 89

WILLIAM EULBERG KELM

Proximity 106

HERMAN H. TRACHSEL

Jumbo 109

RUSSELL C. GRAHAME

Comment 119

THE EDITOR

**PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT IOWA CITY BY
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA**

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

PRICE—10c per copy: \$1 per year: free to members of Society

ADDRESS—The State Historical Society Iowa City Iowa

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. IX

ISSUED IN MARCH 1928

NO. 3

COPYRIGHT 1928 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

The People's Theater

On the evening of August 31, 1857, occurred the opening of the People's Theater of Dubuque, at the corner of Bluff and Eighth streets, on the second floor of the Odd Fellows' building. Sam W. Gulick, talented scenic artist, had done his best to decorate the place beautifully, for it was to be one of the handsomest theaters in the West. People dared to boast of it as being so. The drop was a copy of Cole's "Voyage of Life". Mr. Gulick had put some brilliant work on the proscenium and topped it off with two great eagles done in stucco casts. There was also evidence of his work on ceiling and boxes. The chandeliers and brackets were "very chaste" in design and harmonized well with the other decorations. Many acknowledged that the People's was the finest thing of its kind outside of New York City.

[This review of the brief career of the People's Theater of Dubuque is adapted for THE PALIMPSEST from an article originally published in *The College Spokesman*. — THE EDITOR]

Neither St. Louis nor Chicago possessed a theater so well arranged or equipped. Indeed, it cost \$5000 to fit the place up elegantly, and an additional \$1000 for scenery.

The opening was an immense success, despite the general disappointment because the well-known tragedienne, Miss Eliza Logan, failed to arrive in time for the performance. The house was crowded from pit to gallery, and it heartily welcomed Mrs. Virginia Cunningham and Harry Gossin in *Evadne*. Mrs. Cunningham, who substituted for Miss Logan at the last moment, was one of the People's regular stars. Others came and went as guests, but she remained as a permanent member of the company. So did Harry Gossin, who played opposite her usually, as in *The Love Chase*, *Willow Copse*, and *Jonathan Bradford*.

Harry Gossin bore the stamp of genius, and Dubuque took him to its heart. His forte was melodrama. Usually he carried his audience away by storm. After a time, however, toward the close of the season, he bade farewell to Dubuque and to stage life. He meant to retire to the home of his father in Ohio, where the dramatic critic for the *Dubuque Daily Express and Herald* did not doubt he would "become a prosperous man and the head of a happy family".

Other members of the People's company at the beginning were Mr. P. C. Cunningham, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Mehen, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Fyffe, Mr. and

Mrs. J. Dillon, Messrs. J. W. Wilson, A. Easton, W. Warden, C. Seamen, J. Morrison, C. Smith, and Misses Jennie Waters, Rosa Kingsley, Millie Peters, and Grace Acter. Sometimes they handled their parts acceptably, but on the whole their acting was mediocre. The "star" system of theatricals did not produce well-balanced casts or finished performances. Even the stars did not always shine brightly in such a constellation.

On the evening following the opening of the People's Theater, Miss Logan was present in person to make her debut before a Dubuque audience as Julia in *The Hunchback*. The large audience gave her a reception the like of which she little expected from the "inhabitants of the wilderness". During the remainder of her engagement in Dubuque this talented American actress, among other rôles, played Lady Teazle in Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* — one of her most enjoyable characters — and Pauline in Bulwer's famous play, *The Lady of Lyons*. Miss Logan's elocution was not equalled, it was said, by any other woman on the stage at that time. Her reading had a peculiar charm; her manner was "most brilliant". Her support, too, including Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham, and Harry Gossin, Dubuque's favorite, was happily capable. Her farewell benefit, *The Lady of Lyons* — and every actor and actress of repute who visited Dubuque was usually given a benefit, either by the management or the admiring theater goers, whereby

he or she received a certain proportion of the receipts of the evening — was a triumph. The large and fashionable audience long remembered her charming Pauline.

The members of the company that opened the People's continued to delight Dubuque playgoers. In local esteem they were splendid. Mrs. Cunningham was in fact an actress of no ordinary merit. Of her Camille in Dumas's drama, *Camille* — just as she presented it in Dubuque — a New York paper said: "The play is well calculated to call out the strongest feelings of the heart, and Camille, played by Mrs. Cunningham, melted almost the entire audience to tears. Every countenance by its shade of grief showed that the owner was carried away by the masterly powers of the actress." It was too bad that those who supported Mrs. Cunningham at the People's in this play were not equal to their parts and detracted from the merit of the performance. Harry Gossin, Mrs. Mehen, and Miss Waters made the performance the worst that a Dubuque critic had seen.

Mrs. Cunningham's Therese in *The Orphan of Geneva* was gracefully and truthfully portrayed. Harry Gossin made a perfectly villainous Carwin, while Mr. Cunningham's Lavigne was a masterly conception. He did not overact, and yet he "filled to the full measure." Mrs. Mehen was excellent too. She tried hard to please, and was usually a smooth artist, though she tended to overdo her part in this

play. The critic for the Dubuque *Express and Herald* felt that it hardly looked well to the audience for a lady to kick a gentleman off the stage. If it had to be done, she could have kicked a little lower. He would remind her that it was better to fall below a character than to rise beyond it, for it was only a step from the sublime to the ridiculous.

The local dramatic critic was one of the few to witness the People's presentation of the French drama, *Retribution*, the plot of which was decidedly French and smacked of the *Camille* school, which he did not relish. It violated too much "the attributes of nature". Madame De Beaupre loathes Count Priuli. Yet in the same moment while the expression of that loathing is still reflected on her features, she acknowledges his love. As natural a scene, he thought, as that of Richard the Third's courtship of Anne in the presence of the murdered Henry's remains. Harry Gossin, famous for his melodramatic acting, fairly equalled the painting, "Revenge", by the celebrated Le Brun with his picture of the Count. He actually startled the critic, who felt it would be well for the actor to stop breathing so sharply through his nostrils when he became excited. Mr. Fyffe as Oscar De Beaupre was advised by the critic to drop his "monotonous tone and languishing expression of the countenance," which held him in "durance vile".

The People's always featured, besides the drama of the evening, a short humorous afterpiece. It will

not be presuming too much to say that this was done to make sure of sending the patrons home in good spirits after the heavier performance which might have bored them. One of the afterpieces proved to be especially attractive. It was called *The Dubuque Fireman, or The Heiress of Julien Avenue*.

Hattie Bernard was "a most entertaining" actress. Her forte was comedy. The audiences at the People's and the critic from the *Daily Express and Herald* found her as pleasing an actress as ever stepped on the "boards", and thought that anything but a "bumper" by the theater patrons for her benefit would be, to say the least, ungallant. The pieces for her benefit were *Satan in Paris* and *A Glance at New York*. Modern titles these! The plays of 1857 sometimes smacked of present cinema themes.

A. J. Neafie opened his engagement at the People's with *Hamlet*. The large audience found him excellent, and continued to patronize his efforts in *Othello*, *Richelieu*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *Much Ado About Nothing* — rarely produced in the West — and the tragedy *Harold* — liked wherever it had been played. He was of large stature, possessed a powerful voice, and was noted for his ability to learn a long part in a new play in a single day. Mr. Neafie outdid himself as *Macbeth*. The critic drew attention to the scene in which *Macbeth* and *Macduff* meet and the resulting death as being artistically done. At

his performance of *Macbeth*, which was his benefit, the management, under the old and experienced Mr. Cunningham, who had supplanted F. S. Wilson since the opening of the theater, introduced the "superior" C. B. Mulholland, the first dialect actor on the American stage, in two afterpieces, *The Old Guard* and *The Irish Lion*, in order, as the local critic put it, "to enrich and give zest to the literary repast."

The "charming and sprightly" comedienne, Miss Maggie Mitchell, "Fairy Star of the West," gave a number of performances which made admirers of every one who saw her because of the finish she brought to her rôles in such successes as *Captain Charlotte*, *Meinheer Von Scheniderkindlebomberdonkle*, *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish*, and *Olympia, the Brigand Queen*. Those who saw her once wanted to see her again, and that was something in 1857.

The great tragedian, J. W. Wallack, appeared as King James in *The King of the Commons*, Werner in *Werner*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Leo de Bourbon in *The Man with the Iron Mask*.

Late in December, 1857, there was a lull in the theatrical season at the People's. The *Express and Herald* ceased noticing the performances and withdrew its support. From the beginning the theater had been operated at a financial loss. Finally the company leased the Julien Theater, located at the corner of Locust and Fifth streets, where it met with much success. Apparently the People's was

not used during the remainder of the winter and spring.

According to the *Express and Herald* the failure of the People's was not due to the company of players, but rather to mismanagement. Perhaps the opinion of the newspaper was influenced somewhat by the niggardly distribution of complimentary tickets. Most of the specific reasons for the theater's failure were laid at the door of the directors. They had established a directory which assumed the reins, and robbed the manager of his rightful powers. In making out the free list they gave the press only three tickets, "dead-headed" the city council and stockholders, and cut off those men who could have helped, such as hotel proprietors, railroad conductors, steamboat captains, and clerks. They ignored the profession, and made S. W. Gulick pay for passing an actor in on the opening night, and later they did the same thing to Managers Wilson and Cunningham. They charged Harry Gossin for two tickets on the night of his farewell benefit when they received all that his friends paid in, with the exception of \$25. The directors sometimes refused to pay actors who were engaged by the manager. Gulick was never able to collect all the money due to him for fitting up the theater. Such a policy could have no other result than failure.

On July 10th of the following year, 1858, Henry Farren's "Star Company of the West" opened at the People's. Mr. Farren was a popular actor of

great versatility from the St. Louis theater. The name of Mrs. Farren alone was an assurance that it was a first-class company, for she was one of the most accomplished actresses in America. The company, consisting of Messrs. Wells, Welsh Edwards, G. Pardey, Irwin, H. Pardey, Sheldon; Mesdames Myers, Farren, Carpenter; and the Misses Lowellen, Emma Reynolds, and Ernestine Henrard, had it within its power to redeem Dubuque's stage from the low state into which it had fallen. This company opened with *The Lady of Lyons*. A great audience appeared on the opening night. Private boxes sold for five dollars; stall seats, seventy-five cents; dress circle and parquette seats, fifty cents; and gallery seats, twenty-five cents. Later in the season parquette seats were reduced to twenty-five cents, and the gallery seats to fifteen.

Mrs. Carpenter was one of the best impersonators of old women on the stage. Mr. Edwards could not be surpassed as an impersonator of old men. Mrs. Farren, young and beautiful, was not only an established favorite in St. Louis, but held a high position in New York where she was said to be the rising actress of the period. Mr. Farren's reputation as a popular star was too well known to need any special comment.

The following is a list of the plays included in the Farren company's repertoire: *Camille*, a triumph in which Mrs. Farren with her soft, melodious voice electrified the audience in the death scene; *Hamlet*,

with Mr. Farren as Hamlet; *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, with Mr. Farren as Quasimodo and Mrs. Farren as Esmeralda; *The Gunmaker of Moscow*, a drama of most "thrilling and striking incidents"; *Beauty and the Beast*, a fairy extravaganza which carried the house away by storm; *The Merchant of Venice*, with Mr. Farren as Shylock; *Ingomar, the Barbarian*, a Grecian play in which Mrs. Farren as Parthenia won a wild barbarian to the paths of virtue by her beauty, innocence, and purity; *The Siege of Lucknow*, founded on the Indian war and the Sepoy rebellion then raging; *Ganem, the Slave of Love*, a funny extravaganza in Oriental style; *Richard III*, with Mr. Farren as the bloody and remorseless Richard — a rôle in which he gained the laurels of a Booth, and which the local critic felt but few tragedians could play; *The Marble Heart*; *Macbeth*; *Damon and Pythias*; *The Wild Huntress of the Mississippi*, a celebrated American and Irish comic and serious drama by J. B. Buckstone, in which were combined the romance of old Ireland with the "stirring" times on the banks of the Mississippi during the days of the Indians; *The Devil and Dr. Faustus*, a tremendous hit in Dubuque; *Jack and Jack's Brother*; *Nick of the Woods*; *New York by Day and Night*, one of the greatest dramas of the age "for all who wished to see the romantic, horrible, and mysterious phases of city life"; *Brigand*, a play full of the "horrible, heroic, and startling"; *Corsican Brothers*, a "ter-

rible piece"; and *The Sea of Ice, or the Thirst for Gold*, in which entire fields of ice, the breaking up of icebergs, and the aurora borealis were represented, the most "gorgeous spectacle" ever attempted in Dubuque thus far, with "superb and grand scenery" by Mr. Bowlden and "perfect machinery" by Mr. Sappel. It is needless to say that *The Sea of Ice* drew the largest house of the season.

A large number of Dubuque's prominent citizens tendered Mr. Farren a complimentary farewell benefit, for he had struggled manfully against adversity in the shape of hard times and had lost financially in his effort to maintain the standard set by Dubuque's sister cities. On this occasion Mr. Farren presented *Grandfather Whitehead*. There was an "overwhelming" house. Such a galaxy of beauty and manliness had never before filled the People's. Mr. and Mrs. Farren were loudly called for by the excited audience. The firemen of Dubuque were there en masse. Perhaps the afterpiece, *The Life of a Fireman*, was their attraction.

Mrs. Farren seemed fitted by nature to go hand in hand with her husband in winning fame. She could do both tragedy and comedy equally well. The grand complimentary benefit to Mrs. Farren extended by members of the chivalrous and gallant Dubuque bar was an immense success. The bar, appreciating and admiring Mrs. Farren, wished to extend a benefit so that they, patrons of the drama, could be present with their wives and sweethearts

to pay tribute to her genius. Her coming had been a favorable omen for the local success of the drama, they thought. The patrons were David S. Wilson, J. M. Griffith, S. T. Pierce, W. J. Barker, W. B. Allison, Samuel Duncan, H. T. Utley, F. T. Goodrich, George Shiras, Jr., J. S. Blatchley, Austin Adams, J. A. Chapline, A. H. Dillon, M. B. Mulkern, J. H. O'Neil, William McLenan, Thomas Rogers, E. McCeney, W. Y. Lovell, J. T. Lovell, J. H. Williams, T. M. Monroe, G. S. Jones, and P. T. Walker. Mrs. Farren "did" Marie in *The Daughter of the Regiment* delightfully. The bar must have felt, as the *Express and Herald* critic did, that she was excelled by no other living actress.

Altogether Farren's "Varieties" was most liberally patronized during its season in Dubuque. People turned out admirably, and when the company departed for Davenport and Peoria, many went down to the boat to see them off. They were a gentlemanly and ladylike troupe.

Several weeks later, on October 4, 1858, Mr. Wilson reopened the People's with a good company and made arrangements for many stars to appear. Among them were Mrs. Charles Howard and Mr. L. H. Watkins, favorites in the East and in the South. Both were well received by Dubuque and were generously patronized.

On October 11th, Breslaw and Allen's company came to the People's with two celebrated stars, Mr. and Mrs. D. W. Waller. They were well known in

the East, South, and on the Pacific Coast. Mr. Waller's Hamlet was pronounced by the *Express and Herald's* critic to be as great a Hamlet as could be found on the American and English stage. He was a noble and commanding figure with a deep, full-toned, rich voice, and a complete command of action and modulation. He "emphatically" held the "mirror up to nature". Mrs. Waller's Ophelia was all that a great artist could do in her line. *Macbeth* and *Othello* were beautifully done by the Wallers, and it was a pity that there were not as large audiences as there should have been. They were ably supported by Messrs. Wight, Allen McDonald, Bassford, Beech, Breslaw, and the Misses Allen, Hills, and Graham.

Henry Farren and his troupe returned to the People's in the spring of 1859. Dubuque admired him very much. He stood higher in its estimation as a manager and an actor than any other of the profession who had ever visited the West. Nor was Mrs. Farren held in any less esteem by the community.

During this engagement Mr. Farren brought many stars to Dubuque, among the first of whom was James E. Murdoch, whose success was so great in St. Louis under Mr. Farren that his reengagement was demanded. Mr. Murdoch, besides being an actor, lectured on Shakespeare and on the human voice. He had also been a professor of elocution in some of the most prominent educational institutions

of the day. From time to time he appeared at the old Park Theater in New York City. The press all over the country paid tribute to his sterling worth and his superior talent. During a successful engagement of one hundred and ten nights at the most fashionable theater in London, he was pronounced a legitimate successor to the fame of the Kembles, the Wallacks, the Ellistons, and the Joneses of the English stage. He was thoroughly American in his feelings, however, and took great pride in sustaining the dignity of the American stage. He aimed to uplift the theater as the place where the pure-minded might resort without hesitancy.

The *Express and Herald* critic felt that Murdoch's merit consisted chiefly in his entire freedom from rant and the perfect simplicity of his style. He played the "noble, impassioned, unfortunate philanthropical" Evelyn in Bulwer's *Money* to perfection, while the local theatrical reporter was confident that his young Mirabel in George Farquhar's *The Inconstant*, would bring out the crowd that had thus far stayed away on account of rain, even though the patrons should be "drenched with pitchforks". While in Dubuque Mr. Murdoch also played Hamlet, and Charles De Moor in Schiller's "magnificent" drama, *The Robber*.

James H. Hackett opened his engagement at Dubuque upon the completion of Mr. Murdoch's appearance. He was reputed to be the greatest living Falstaff, and Mr. Farren deserved much credit for

bringing him to Dubuque. Indeed, his rendition of Falstaff in Dubuque supported by Mrs. Farren who played Prince Hal, was such that he was acclaimed the equal, if not the superior, of the original Falstaff. He also appeared in "the greatest American comedy", *The Kentuckian's Visit to New York*.

Following Mr. Hackett came the popular Miss Mathilda Heron, the "third star of the first magnitude" to play in Dubuque. After the death of Mlle. Rachel she was regarded as the greatest living tragedienne. The houses for Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Hackett not having been very good, it was hoped that the people would turn out for Miss Heron, despite the bad weather. She was a high-priced entertainer but Mr. Farren realized that Dubuque would accept only the best. Her *Camille* was believed by the Dubuque critic to be the best he had ever seen. She seemed to appreciate the character, and was possessed of the power to materialize her conception of it, bringing out, "with the refined taste of a true artist, all the delicate lights and shadows" and combining, "in exquisite harmony", the great contrasts of the character. "Subduing and spiritualizing the sensuous portions of the character, she makes the play what few have ever succeeded in doing, a beautiful, instructive, refining representation."

Medea, translated from the Greek of Euripides and adapted to the English stage by Miss Heron, served as a splendid vehicle for her. *Mathilde*, or

the Lone Chateau, translated from the French of Eugene Sue and adapted to the English stage by Miss Heron, was also presented by her. Upon being called for at the end of the play, she made a pleasant little speech, complimenting Dubuque for its theater, and asserting that she had wished so much to visit the place that she had interrupted her New York engagement in order to have the pleasure of coming. She spoke "justly and with some severity", however, upon the lack of local support of Mr. Farren's theatrical efforts.

During the week following Miss Heron's appearance, there were to be no stars, but something quite as good — and at prices that would enable everybody to attend who theretofore could not afford fifty cents. One of the most "beautiful, laughable, and interesting" pantomimes ever produced before the Dubuque public was given in the form of *Puss in Boots, or The Fairy of the Cat Kingdom*. The local scene depicting Brown's saloon caused more laughter and applause than anything on the Dubuque stage for some time. All the tricks worked well, and the rapidity with which they followed one another was "marvelous".

May 14, 1859, marked the close of the dramatic season in Dubuque. Upon the request of a number of patrons, however, Mr. Farren allowed a portion of his company to remain so that the friends of Welsh Edwards might show their appreciation of his efforts by tendering him a benefit. Mr. Edwards

planned to furnish a series of dramatic performances to suit the tastes of the time, alternating two nights each week between Dubuque and Galena. A band drummed up recruits for his benefit which turned out to be a great success. He brought down the house "tremendously" with his three pieces, *Cavaliers and Roundheads*, *A Bachelor's Bedroom*, and *The Magic Shirt*.

On the twenty-seventh of May, 1859, the activities of the People's Theater came to an abrupt and untimely end. Like Shakespeare's Globe, it was destroyed by fire.

WILLIAM EULBERG KELM.

Proximity

On June 7, 1847, the post office of Lost Rock was established in Davis County and Isaac M. Foster was appointed postmaster. Apparently the place was well named, for the exact location of Lost Rock is a mystery. Old maps do not record it. Probably it was somewhere between Drakesville and Bloomfield.

On account of its nearness to these two towns the post office of Lost Rock produced no revenue for the government and accommodated very few people. The office was allowed to continue for a time on this basis, but in less than a year the authorities in Washington became convinced that it would never be a paying proposition. Meanwhile, according to a local historian, Joseph W. Waldron had become postmaster. He was scarcely familiar with the duties of his office, however, when on March 24, 1848, he received an ominous communication from the Post Office Department.

"Sir," the letter began. "On account of your proximity to another office, this Department has decided to discontinue the post office of Lost Rock." Then followed directions to deliver all books and papers pertaining to the office, all mail pouches, locks, keys, and other property of the United States to the postmaster at Bloomfield. The letter was

signed by S. A. Hobbie, First Assistant Postmaster General.

When Mr. Waldron received this communication he read it and shook his head. He read it again and again, but still he did not fully understand it. He realized that his newly acquired office was being abolished; but why? It had only recently been established. Was he to blame? There was one word particularly that puzzled him. He could not dismiss it from his mind. Finally, in desperation, he went to one of his neighbors for advice. This neighbor had been a justice of the peace for several years and had learned the difference between a summons and execution, and in his own estimation was somewhat of a legal authority. He read the letter through twice very carefully, but he too was unable to solve the problem and only shook his head gravely.

After talking it all over, the two came to the sage conclusion that some one had been vilely traducing the postmaster, and he decided to write a letter to the Post Office Department in self-vindication. In due time the Postmaster General received a carefully prepared document from the injured postmaster of Lost Rock. The postmaster gave the history of his ancestry and recited many worthy deeds of his forebears. Some of them had "fought" in the Revolution, while others had achieved distinction in their chosen fields of endeavor. He told of his long residence in the county, that he had been a school

director of his district and constable of Fók River Township for six years. In each of these positions he had given the very best of satisfaction. Furthermore he had been postmaster once in Ohio and had never heard any complaint against him. In short, this was the first time he had ever been charged with *proximity* — the guilt of which he indignantly denied. Upon his honor, he had never done such a thing in all his life.

The effect of Mr. Waldron's plea of innocence upon the clerks of the Post Office Department is not definitely known. It is supposed, however, that it was somewhat damaging to vest buttons.

The ex-postmaster continued to be very despondent until he received a letter from the Department informing him that "proximity" was not a reflection upon his moral character. Thereupon he became reconciled to the loss of his office.

HERMAN H. TRACHSEL.

Jumbo

By team and excursion train people came to see Jumbo, the white elephant, at Belle Plaine back in the eighties. This curiosity was not confined in a circus tent, nor fed on peanuts, nor guided around by the jabs of dusky natives. In fact the whole trouble with Jumbo was that he would not "keep anything down" and refused to be governed at all. For over a year all attempts to harness him were futile and he ran wild to the great enjoyment of the youngsters and curious travellers. Jumbo, one of the wonders of the world, was an artesian well.

That Belle Plaine was the center of an extensive artesian area was discovered in the spring of 1882. Several farmers who had put down deep wells were amazed to see the water rise within twenty-five feet of the top. In April, 1886, Hilton Brothers, in order to secure an unlimited supply of water for their creamery, drilled a two-inch well to the depth of two hundred and fifteen feet. Much to their surprise the water shot out of the ground fifty-three feet into the air. This unexpected event caused much comment in that part of the State. Quick to capitalize this unforeseen asset, Hilton Brothers soon had the flowing water circulating all over their premises and used it for refrigeration as well as for fire protection.

Certain citizens who lived in the best residential section of Belle Plaine next organized a company to drill a well in their part of town and supply water to the whole neighborhood. The location, being on a hill, would provide plenty of fall to afford pressure for circulation. They struck water at a depth of two hundred and ninety feet but it would not rise above the surface. While they were attempting to use the well with the aid of pumps several successful artesian wells were drilled on a lower level. A well in front of the Tremont House filled the two-inch casing and boiled out of a forty-five foot one-inch pipe placed on top of that. The canning factory likewise put down a well and had water flowing all over the plant and from numerous jets and fountains.

The merchants on First Street, realizing the need of better fire protection, decided to organize two stock companies to drill wells for that purpose. One company included all of the business men on the main street east of the center of the block between Beech and Maple streets while the other was composed of the merchants west of that point. The former company put down a three-inch well which reached water at two hundred and twenty-five feet. This well, flowing at the rate of two hundred and fifty gallons per minute made a beautiful fountain as the water rose many feet in the air. The pressure was sufficient to force water through one thousand feet of hose without noticeable loss of pressure.

All of the wells preceding Jumbo were in the north and central parts of the city, while the south side near the schoolhouse was without any water for fire protection. Thereupon, the citizens in that section signed an agreement to pay equal amounts, not to exceed one hundred and seventy-five dollars, to be expended in drilling a well. The school district was a party to the arrangement and the city agreed to place the well in condition for use. William Weir and Sons of Monticello received the contract from the city which called for a three-inch well at Beech and Washington streets. The other wells that Weir and Son had drilled were all two-inch; but when they readily accepted the contract the city supposed that they had the proper drills to put down a three-inch well.

They began work at once, using their regular two-inch drill. To quiet the inquisitiveness of the on-lookers, the drillers explained that they intended to ream out the shaft to the required three inches. After going down a considerable distance they drove in sixty feet of three-inch casing by force, and continued to drill through the casing until they struck water at the depth of one hundred and ninety-three feet. The top section of the casing had been injured while they were working, so they unscrewed it at the first joint and attempted to put in a new one. But the casing would not go in again without the application of force. Exasperated at this difficulty, the drillers determined to let the

force of the flow ream out the two-inch hole. Suiting action to the idea they left the scene and were gone all afternoon, while the water continued its work. This was on August 26, 1886.

Late that evening passersby became alarmed at the increasing flow of water, hunted up the drillers, and advised them to put on the top section of casing. After much hard work this was accomplished and they left for the night.

The next day Weir came back and raised the sixty-foot pipe already in and commenced churning it up and down in order to put in additional three-inch pipe. Much to his surprise the water burst up from outside the casing and could not be controlled. At four o'clock Weir went up town. Jumbo was a monster already. Water, sand, and rocks were boiling out. Men were put to work keeping ditches open to carry off the water but it was an impossible task.

After a while Weir came back to look at the well. Apparently one look was enough for he immediately hitched up his team and drove off. At six o'clock the water was coming out in great torrents. At seven Weir had not come back and the people were becoming alarmed. The white elephant "was throwing a stream a foot and one-half in diameter to the height of five feet above the surface." No one knew whether Weir had deserted or had gone for something to work with. "At eight the people were almost crazy!" They appealed to the mayor to

save them. The mayor called a special meeting of the council at once. Some one suggested getting a pile driver and filling the well with piling. That seemed so plausible that the council spent several days trying to secure a pile driver.

Despite the efforts of the council, Jumbo was not to be quickly tamed. Many different means of subduing him were tried without success. "Large grain sacks filled with sand were tossed in and were thrown back out again as though they were mere feathers. Boiler flues, cones, all sizes of casings, hand pumps, common pumps, injector pumps, elevator pumps, and even the aid of Chicago's expert engineer failed to choke him."

It was estimated that the "eighth wonder of the world", as the residents of Belle Plaine were pleased to call it, was running five million gallons every twenty-four hours. It required two streams twelve feet wide and a foot deep flowing at the rate of ten miles per hour to carry the water to the Iowa River. Workmen had a hard time keeping the ditches open, for Jumbo was constantly throwing out wood, bones, weeds, and pebbles. Sand stood four feet deep in the streets. Small boys reaped a financial harvest by bottling some of the pebbles and selling them as souvenirs to the hundreds of visitors who came from afar to see the natural fountain spouting water five feet in the air from a hole fully three feet in diameter. One visitor, becoming too eager, stepped off the planks and fell into the well, but he reported

that he came out just as fast as he went in, though he was badly scared. It has been estimated that Jumbo deposited from five hundred to one thousand car loads of sand on the near-by streets and lawns.

Jumbo soon gained much notoriety abroad. Newspapers reported "water spouting hundreds of feet in the air, with a roar that could be heard for miles." They went so far as to picture people being rescued by boats from the upper stories of houses. One imaginative reporter connected the outburst of the well with the Charleston earthquake that occurred several days later. Other papers attributed the well and the earthquake, as well as renewed geyser activity in Yellowstone Park, all to a common movement of the earth's crust.

Many people were using the water for medicinal purposes despite the conclusions of the doctors and chemists that it was not fit to drink. It had a strong mineral taste but was very clear. There was a continual procession of people going to the well both day and night to fill their pails, pitchers, and jugs. Others, living farther away, shipped kegs and barrels to Belle Plaine to be filled in order that they might "drink and live". One such person said, "having inherited a bilious temperament I have been compelled to take medicine for years." But after drinking this mineral water he "found himself perfectly well and cured from all previous ailments." Another wrote that the doctors gave him only four weeks to live, but after using the mag-

netic mineral water his troubles were all gone and his health much improved. A third added that his rheumatism had entirely disappeared and he had no further use for a cane.

In the meantime the city council had taken charge of operations. Mr. Weir had left the neighborhood. The council decided to receive sealed bids for a contract to close the well. The bids were opened on October 20th, and the contract was awarded to L. King of Marshalltown. He was to do the work in ninety days and was to receive the sum of \$2000. King came on the scene and at once built a high board fence around the well. He next obtained a diver's suit and was going to charge an admittance fee to see the performance. But the city council put a stop to this by reminding him that he was hired to control the well and not to make a show of it.

Mr. King worked continuously until May 20, 1887, but failed to stop the well entirely. At that time he notified the council that he was ready to give up and close the contract. A committee appointed by the council investigated and reported that the well "was not and had never been under control." King then offered to settle for eighteen hundred and sixty-two dollars, but the council refused. They were quite willing to pay the contract price when the well was under control. King answered that he would not touch the well again and threatened suit. The council was advised not to yield, however, so

another driller decamped and the city again had the "white elephant" on its hands.

The council finally decided to superintend operations and hired the Palmer Brothers, who operated a foundry in Belle Plaine, to do the work. After some further delay in obtaining equipment, ninety feet of eight-inch pipe was put down inside of the sixteen-inch flue casing already in the well. Between the two pipes was a contrivance devised by the Palmers, consisting of two flanges, one of which was fastened to the bottom section of casing and the other was connected with a hydraulic jack. The space between the two flanges was then filled with hemp which was packed in tightly with the jack. This stopped the flow of water between the pipes and caused all the water to come out of the smaller pipe. The remaining space between the two casings was filled with cement and sand and the job was done.

Jumbo was finally choked! He breathed his last on October 6, 1887, after having been rampant for a year and two months. In this time he had consumed one hundred and sixty-three feet of eighteen-inch pipe, seventy-seven feet of sixteen-inch pipe, sixty feet of five-inch pipe, an iron cone three feet in diameter and twenty-four feet long, besides forty carloads of stone, one hundred and thirty barrels of cement, and an inestimable amount of sand and clay.

Many people thought that the well had tapped an

aqueduct leading from some large and distant body of water. Others were quite sure that the water came from an underground channel of the Cedar River probably developed below Waterloo. Another theory was that a great fault in the earth's crust had raised up the deep, underlying veins of ground water so that they were near the surface.

Professor T. C. Chamberlain of Chicago, who made a personal examination of Jumbo, and the many other wells in the Belle Plaine artesian area, came to a different conclusion. Jumbo, he said, "is simply a flowing drift well, run rampant for want of control. It has its phenomenal feature in its magnitude and its lesson in its expensive and destructive career through injudicious handling."

Other geologists agreed with Chamberlain that Jumbo was merely one in a thousand of such flowing drift wells in Iowa. The retreating glaciers left beds of sand which acted as the aquifers for the wells. These sheets of sand were inclined underground. They become covered with "impervious clay" by later glacial invasions which converted them into channels for artesian waters. Professor W. H. Norton adds that artesian wells of this class are directly dependent upon the rainfall of the region and should show corresponding fluctuations in flow.

Although scientists made a commonplace thing of the awe of the masses and the delight of the youngsters, Jumbo has not lost his glamour. Old timers

still recall his greatness and the way he baffled the experts when they endeavored to control him. But now he lives only in memory. The asphalt paving passes over his grave and the curb is his only headstone.

RUSSELL C. GRAHAME.

Comment by the Editor

THE STAR SYSTEM

There may have been a "golden age" in the history of the American theater, but it was not during the fifties of the last century. Probably the stage was then at its lowest ebb, particularly after the financial crisis of 1857. That was a period of hard times for everybody: professional entertainers were no exception. When food and clothing consume the income, people are not so likely to spend their money for frivolity — or art if you prefer, though dramatic art as presented at Iowa theaters in the fifties was generally crude, despite the appearance of some of the ablest metropolitan stars. But the stars came alone, depending upon the stock company of the local theater for their supporting cast.

This "pernicious star system" was the principal factor in the decline of the theater. The stock company players were barely tolerable, though usually one or two possessed real talent. In addition to their natural limitations, these local actors were required to take parts in totally unfamiliar plays that happened to be in the repertoire of the visiting star. And since a different play was staged every evening, they often had no longer than a day in which to learn the lines and rehearse the stage business.

Prodigious feats of memory were performed. Andrew Jackson Neafie, who played at the People's Theater of Dubuque in 1857, once learned over thirteen hundred lines "dead-letter perfect" in one afternoon. Sometimes five or six plays were in the process of rehearsal at once. What hectic nights for the prompter! A finished production under such circumstances was impossible, no matter how brilliant the star might be. Yet if the star system had not been in vogue, very few of the leading actors would have played in Iowa. Transportation was too expensive and uncertain for troupes to tour the country with a single play.

Another fault of the star system was the poor pay of the local players. Ten dollars a week was normal wages for a utility man, character actors and the leading lady got a little more, while the star took the lion's share. To supplement their regular compensation, benefit performances were arranged for favorite players whereby they received part of the profits of the evening. Stars demanded one or more benefits for themselves during an engagement.

But again it should be noted that Iowa playgoers profited by the low theatrical wage scale, for it compelled capable actors to seek employment at provincial theaters during the summer when the St. Louis, New Orleans, and eastern stages were idle. This influx of more experienced players was a boon to the local stock companies.

J. E. B.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857
Located at Iowa City Iowa

PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY

The Quarterly Journal of History
The Palimpsest—A monthly magazine
The Public Archives Series
The Iowa Biographical Series
The Iowa Economic History Series
The Iowa Social History Series
The Iowa Applied History Series
The Iowa Chronicles of the World War
The Miscellaneous Publications
The Bulletins of Information

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the State Historical Society may be secured through election by the Board of Curators. The annual dues are \$3.00. Members may be enrolled as Life Members upon the payment of \$50.00.

Address all Communications to

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Iowa City Iowa